

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN JORDAN: AN  
EXAMPLE FROM TELL DEIR 'ALLA

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**Abstract:**

Thousands of archaeological sites are recorded, but unfortunately only some are excavated in Jordan. Many of these were either destroyed or at few cases protected by the local communities, in the meantime others were illegally excavated by the treasure hunters. Archaeological work in Jordan must place the local communities as the heart of protection and presenting efforts of this cultural heritage. It has been argued that by engaging the local communities in the long-term archaeological fieldworks and in restoring and conserving the archaeological sites on year-round programs that might help with local employment, training and education. This paper aims at shedding light on the local communities' attitude against the archaeological sites. The archaeological site of Tell Deir 'Alla might be considered as a good example of explaining this relation. To discuss, the partners of the project (Jordanian and Dutch) constructed an archaeological research station that includes a small site-museum in which many inhabitants of the town Deir 'Alla are engaged in supervising, cleaning and cooking for the teams excavating at sites in Valley and renting the station. Moreover, the inhabitants of Deir 'Alla and the surroundings are always involved in all activities of the excavations conducted in the Jordan valley. In addition, the Tell Deir 'Alla long-term project produced an excellent relationship amongst the local community and the members of the joint expedition. We assume that due to this good relationship, the financial help offered to the local community of Deir 'Alla, and the archaeological field training offered to the inhabitants of the town Deir 'Alla and the surrounding villages, the site has been saved and protected from destruction and illicit excavations.

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**1. Introduction**

Community archaeology is identified as a distinctive set of practices within the wider discipline, which might be considered as a relatively new development. In other words, it means to leave part control of the project to the local community [1]. It is well understood for the archaeologists that the archaeological sites are artificial and were made by human-beings but not only found and excavated by them. Those sites were constructed through time and transform the history, heritage and human

behaviors of nations. Heritage and conservation have become recently important issues in studies on place, cultural identity and the preservation of the past. Thousands of archaeological sites in Jordan are recorded, and some are excavated at all the three Jordanian geographic zones, the Jordan Valley, the mountain ranges and the Badiya. Unfortunately, several of those sites were either destroyed or protected by the local communities; in the meantime others were illegally excavated by the

treasure hunters. We agree that archaeological work in Jordan must place the local communities as the heart of protection and presenting efforts of this cultural heritage. It has been argued that by engaging the communities in the long-term archaeological fieldwork and in restoring and conserving the archaeological sites on year-round programs that focus on local employment, training and education will help in protecting the cultural resources. Best example for this case can be seen in the "Temple of the Winged Lions" project, which has been started in Petra since 2009 as a joint collaboration between The American Center for Oriental Research "ACOR", The Department of Antiquities and the Petra Archaeological Park [2].

## **2. Examples of Demolished/Bulldozed Sites**

The author of this paper supervised and participated in excavating several archaeological sites in Jordan. Most of these sites are located in the Jordan Valley (Abu Hamid, Deir 'Alla, Tell Hammeh and Tell Damiya) and some others on the high ranges region (Jebel Abu Thawwab, 'Ain Ghazal, eh-Sayyeh, es-Sukhneh, and Wadi Shu'eib). Some of which were conducted as a short-term project, meanwhile others were excavated for many seasons (2 months a year). Some of these sites are located at cultivated areas, beyond the highways and in amid the urban centers. Unfortunately, many of the above mentioned sites were either completely or partially bulldozed. For example, the sites of Jebel Abu Thawwab, fig. (1-a) was demolished in the operation of widening the main high-way Amman-Irbid [3,4], and the eh-Sayyeh site [5], fig. (1-b) was completely bulldozed by the land lord for cultivation purposes as he claimed. Additionally, the major Neolithic site 'Ain Ghazal was partially bulldozed in 2011, fig. (1-c) in the aim of building up a school [6]. Almost daily I drive through the town of Al-Husn, where the archae-

ological site Tell el-Husn is located, fig. (1-d), and for my big surprise I noticed in March 2017 that the eastern side of the Tell is partially bulldozed. Moreover, threatened sites by bulldozing operations are not only limited to sites locate in the Jordan Valley and the mountain area region, but also extended to those sites located in the Badiya. For example, during a visit to the Meshash excavations in 2016 and 2017 I have noticed that the north and east walls of the Umayyad Meshash Palace are bulldozed by treasure hunters, fig. (1-e). It appeared that the landlords of those sites were the ones behind this awful deed. To discuss, it appears that there are two different attitudes of the local communities towards the archaeological sites located in the amid, adjacent to urban settlements, or even far away from them have been recognized. The first attitude is that they (local communities) reacted very positively and protected the archaeological sites. The second, they do not care about protecting the sites, but instead they destroyed them in the aim of either looking for treasures, cultivation operations or to construct buildings. Moreover, the property of those sites whether common or private plays also a decisive role in protecting and preserving them. The Jordan Valley is the area extending between the Tiberius Lake in the north and the Dead Sea in the South and measures 105 km, fig. (1-f). This area has been surveyed during the last decades, and the surveyors registered hundred of sites spread over the three Jordan Valley geographical zones: az-Zor, al-Kattar and al-Ghor [7,8]. It might be argued that this area is overwhelmed with ancient small towns, villages and farmsteads built up over or in the neighborhoods of the archaeological sites. This means, that the inhabitants of these settlement must have some kind of relationship with these archaeological sites. To enlighten this relationship we present below a study that has been conducted in 2004



Figure (1) Shows **a.** Abu Thawwab after bulldozing in 1990, **b.** bulldozing the site eh-Sayyeh 2014-2015, **c.** Ain Ghazal bulldozing in 2011, **d.** general view of Tell el-Husn, **e.** the bulldozer cut of the Qasr Meshash, **f.** A general view of the Jordan Valley.

### 3. Local Communities and Tell Deir 'Alla

The Tell Deir 'Alla is located in the central Jordan Valley and the Archaeological Project is a joint venture of Leiden University (Holland) and Yarmouk University (Jordan) in co-operation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The excavations of Leiden University directed by Franken started in 1960 and continued until 1966. After a gap following the fifth season in 1967 the excavations were resumed by Franken in 1976. Since 1979 they have been co-directed by G. Van der

Kooij and M. Ibrahim, first in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, and since 1980 with the Yarmouk University. After excavations were stopped for some years, then resumed in 1994, with a series of six seasons ending in 2009 (co-directed by G. Van der Kooij and, since 1996, Z. Kafafi) [9]. The archaeological excavations at the site of Tell Deir 'Alla might be considered as a long-term project that started in 1960 and continued through years until the last excavation season took place in 2009. The excavations of Tell Deir 'Alla have

indicated that the site was inhabited from approximately 1700 through 350 B.C. The basis of the chronological determinations is provided by the stratigraphic analysis of the separate excavation fields, each comprising a set of squares. “Absolute” dating is obtained by connecting artifact typology to their chronology based upon the absolute dates of other sites, and on a few historical connections with the chronology of Egypt [10,11]. To mention, in 1982 the partners of the Project (Yarmouk University, the Department of Antiquities, and the Leiden University) represented by Moawiyah Ibrahim, Adnan Hadidi and Henk Franken, consequently decided to support the long-term project by the establishing an archaeological research station which contains a small site-museum at the southern side of the site [12]. This research station is supervised and directed by the Judah family since its establishment in 1982, fig. (2-a).

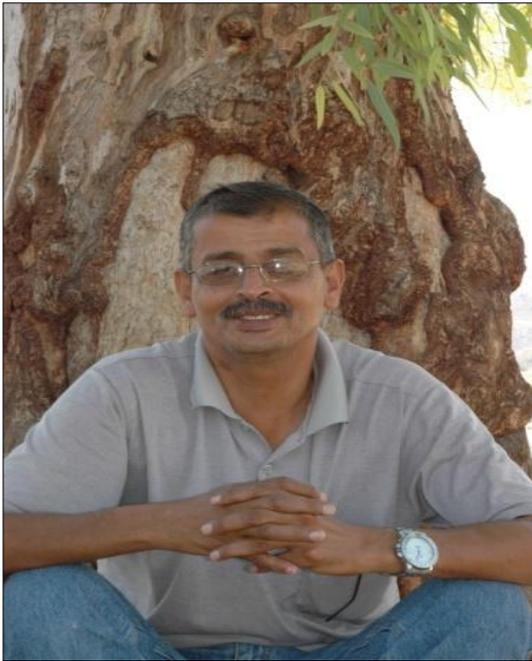


Figure (2-a) Shows Ahmad Judeh (*Administrator of the Station*)

Moreover, the Department of Antiquities rented offices in a building situated just across the main Ghor street, just to the east of the Tell, and built up a small lattice and trail ways leading from the

bottom to the top of the Tell. The local community of Tell Deir 'Alla was engaged not only in the excavation operations, but also were employed for guarding the site and maintaining the archaeological station building. The Judeh family members built their houses at the southern side of the Tell Deir 'Alla, after building up the Archaeological Station Al Haj Fares Judeh has been employed by Yarmouk Univ. to work as a gardener and a guard for it. After his death his son Ahmed took over the position, their presence in the area helped a lot in preserving and protecting the site. To add, the Tell Deir 'Alla long-term project produced an excellent relationship amongst the inhabitants of the town Deir 'Alla and the surrounding villages and the members of the joint expedition (Jordanian and Dutch) all through seasons. We assume that due to this good relationship several local individuals became very loyal to the project. In fact, through the project the people of Deir 'Alla generate their income and gain the archaeological field experience. In addition, the project Deir 'Alla open doors for the local community to join other digs in the Jordan Valley either as technicians or laborer. My first participation in the excavation at the site Tell Deir 'Alla happened in the year 1983, when I was kindly invited by M. Ibrahim, then the co-director of the project, to join the Yarmouk University team. From that time on I noticed that there is a very strong relationship between the expedition members and the inhabitants of the town Tell Deir 'Alla and the surrounding villages. For example, the families of Abu Usba', Judeh, Al-Balawneh, Al-Madahneh and al-Atiyyan are living in the neighborhood of the site and established a friendship with the Jordanian and Dutch team working in the excavation. Moreover, from the beginning of the project, late Henk Franken directed the Jericho technicians (such as Ali Abdul er-Rasoul) to train local people

in the excavating techniques, from those we may name Amin and Jamil Kanaan who trained also many others living at Deir 'Alla and the neighboring villages such as the villages of Dirar and Khizma, one of those is Mohsen Mustapha, fig. (2-b).



Figure (2-b) Shows Mr. Muhsen Mustapha one of the trained as technician

Those well experienced technicians became members of many other excavations in the Central Jordan Valle. Thus, they are kept busy at least half of the year in the digging operations in that area of Jordan. In addition to the fact that the excavations became the main source of life for those technicians and to the other excavations labors, they were and still involved in explaining the uncovered stratigraphy and identifying the excavated archaeological objects. To mention, late Ali Abdul-Rassul was the one to draw Franken's attention to the plaster pieces on which the Bal'am Text was written. The local people of Deir 'Alla was not involved only in the digging operation, but they were and still a very effective human element in helping the expeditions during the excavations. For example, they are the ones responsible for cooking, cleaning the station building and washing the pottery sherds and the clothes of the team members. For example Um Salem, fig. (2-c) who is living adjacent to the south-western side of the Tell, was involved in the project as a cook.



Figure (2-c) Shows Um Salem and her daughter-in-law the Cooks

She was paid than the normal workman, of this she helped in making her family living. After Um Salem got old and became unable to cook, her daughter-in-law inherited the job from her. During the early sixties, the Abu Usba' family built themselves a small house on the south-western edge of the site and from the beginning of the excavation in 1960 the family became very much involved in the dig. Abu Mahmoud, who was the head of the family was trained by the Jericho-men as a technician and was always a permanent team member of the excavation operation. After he passed away, years ago, his daughter Fatmeh, became a member the team. Her role was to wash the clothes and to clean the building and set up the bed and living rooms. To discuss, I decided in 2004 and 2009 to explore the role of the local community living at the town Deir 'Alla and the surrounding villages. Thus, I interviewed several laborers working for the dig and the result of this study has been already published as an essay written in Arabic language in Ad-Dustour daily Newspaper [13]. In this study, it has been declared by the interviewed Deir 'Alla local community people that they make their living from the Tell Deir 'Alla project. Moreover, one of them (Muhsen) said without the project he would not be able to finance his children school fees. All of them agreed that though the duration of

the project is almost six to eight weeks a year, but they could save money for living for most of the year. Thus, they declared themselves ready to prevent any illicit excavation to be undertaken at the Tell Deir 'Alla. It might be deduced that by offering the local community the financial support to live from, and by joining the dig they have the opportunity to educate themselves about the archaeology of Jordan. To mention, I have been invited few years ago to deliver a speech to the pupils of the Deir 'Alla Secondary Schools for Girls in which I have concentrated on the history and archaeology of the Jordan Valley in General, and Tel Deir 'Alla in specific. In addition, it might be mentioned here that the expedition through the Dutch partner used to help poor families living in the adjacent areas of the Tell by donating them a lump-sum of money. All those reasons encouraged the local community of the town Deir 'Alla and the surrounding villages, to protect the site from any illicit excavation.

#### 4. Conclusions

*Few years ago I met with HE Lina Annab, the former minister of Tourism and Antiquities, HE Dr. Monther Jamhwai the former General Director of Antiquities in the presence of other friends in her office and discussed the problem of demolishing the archaeological sites in Jordan. The General Director was extremely unhappy of the situation and said loudly: "we could not do anything to stop bulldozing archaeological sites because they are of private property, and we have no money to compensate the land". Thus, if the governmental financial support for rescuing the cultural heritage is not enough or even unavailable, then what is the solution? I believe in this case local communities (whom they are well to do) and the universal institutions that are either involved or interested in conserving and presenting the cultural heritage should interfere and being part in the decision making regarding the cultural heritage. This interference should be reflected by helping the Department of Antiquities of Jordan financially and providing the experience needed. I assume that all individuals' governmental and non-governmental organization*

*are responsible and must be part and responsible for the sustainability of this cultural heritage for future generations. We believe that also the location of the archaeological sites in areas very close or amid the urban centers influenced and played a major role to their sustainability. In addition, it might be argued that there are two different attitudes of the local communities towards the archaeological sites located in the middle or adjacent to urban settlements have been recognized. The first attitude is that they (local communities) reacted very positively and protected the archaeological sites. The second, they do not care in protecting the sites, but instead they destroy them in the aim of finding treasures, using them for cultivation operations or to construct buildings. Moreover, the status of those sites, if they are of common or private properties plays also a decisive role in protecting and preserving them.*

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